

HAZARDOUS WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK CONTINUES THROUGH FRIDAY TODAY IS LIGHTNING HAZARDS DAY

IN COOPERATION WITH THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE AND STATE AND LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES, GOVERNOR CHARLIE CRIST HAS PROCLAIMED THIS WEEK, FEBRUARY 1 THROUGH 7, 2009, AS FLORIDA HAZARDOUS WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK. HAZARDOUS AWARENESS WEEK IS DESIGNED TO TEACH FLORIDIANS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF HAZARDOUS WEATHER AND HOW TO BE PREPARED BY DEVELOPING PLANS TO RESPOND TO THEM. THE PURPOSE OF THIS ANNUAL EVENT IS TO FOCUS ON THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SEVERE WEATHER THAT POSE A THREAT TO LIFE AND PROPERTY IN FLORIDA.

THE FOLLOWING HAZARDOUS WEATHER TOPICS WILL BE DISCUSSED:

-TODAY	LIGHTNING HAZARDS
-TUESDAY	MARINE HAZARDS AND RIP CURRENTS
-WEDNESDAY	TORNADOES AND SEVERE THUNDERSTORMS
-THURSDAY	HURRICANES AND FLOODING
-FRIDAY	TEMPERATURE EXTREMES AND WILD FIRES

LIGHTNING REMAINS THE NUMBER ONE WEATHER HAZARD, ON AVERAGE, FOR WEST CENTRAL AND SOUTHWEST FLORIDA. IN 2008, FORTUNATELY, NO ONE WAS KILLED, HOWEVER FOUR PEOPLE WERE INJURED BY LIGHTNING STRIKES IN THE LOCAL AREA. LIGHTNING ALSO CAUSED A LITTLE OVER A HALF MILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF DAMAGE ACROSS WEST CENTRAL AND SOUTHWEST FLORIDA. FOR THE REST OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA, FOUR PEOPLE WERE KILLED BY LIGHTNING AND 27 WERE INJURED IN 2008. FOR THE NATION AS A WHOLE, 27 PEOPLE DIED BY LIGHTNING STRIKES AND 302 WERE INJURED. SOME OF THESE CASUALTIES COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED BY USING SIMPLE, SMART SAFETY TIPS.

...LIGHTNING SAFETY OUTDOORS...

BEING OUTDOORS WHEN THUNDERSTORMS ARE NEARBY INVOLVES RISK, AND CERTAIN LOCATIONS ARE WORSE THAN OTHERS. OF THE LIGHTNING CASUALTY CASES IN THE UNITED STATES WHERE THE LOCATION OF THE INCIDENT WAS REPORTED, ABOUT 48 PERCENT OCCURRED IN OPEN FIELDS, BALL PARKS, OR PLAY GROUNDS, ANOTHER 23 PERCENT OCCURRED UNDER TREES, ABOUT 12 PERCENT INVOLVED WATER-RELATED ACTIVITIES, AND ABOUT 6 PERCENT INVOLVED GOLFING. PEOPLE DRIVING FARM EQUIPMENT OR OTHER HEAVY EQUIPMENT ACCOUNTED FOR ABOUT 7 PERCENT.

IN 2008, FOR FLORIDA'S SUNCOAST, TWO OF THE PEOPLE WERE INJURED WHILE WORKING IN A FIELD AND ANOTHER WAS INJURED WHILE WADE FISHING IN THE GULF.

TO MINIMIZE THE THREAT OF BEING STRUCK BY LIGHTNING WHILE OUTDOORS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHEN THE LIGHTNING THREAT BEGINS TO INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY, AND WHEN THE THREAT IS REDUCED TO MINIMAL LEVELS. IN GENERAL, THE THREAT BEGINS WELL BEFORE MOST PEOPLE THINK IT BEGINS, AND ENDS WELL AFTER PEOPLE THINK IT ENDS. UNFORTUNATELY, IT IS THIS LACK OF UNDERSTANDING THAT ACCOUNTS FOR MANY LIGHTNING CASUALTIES.

BY USING SOME BASIC RULES, YOU CAN GREATLY REDUCE YOUR RISK OF BECOMING A LIGHTNING CASUALTY.

NUMBER ONE, PLAN AHEAD. IF THUNDERSTORMS ARE FORECAST, CONSIDER CANCELING OR POSTPONING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES SO THAT YOU AVOID A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATION.

NUMBER TWO, MONITOR THE WEATHER CONDITIONS. WATCH THE SKY FOR ANY SIGNS OF A DEVELOPING OR APPROACHING STORM, PARTICULARLY IF YOU NEED A LONG TIME TO GET TO A SAFE PLACE.

NUMBER THREE, USE THE "30/30" RULE. THIS IS MOST IMPORTANT BEFORE AND AFTER THE WORST OF THE STORM. COUNT THE SECONDS BETWEEN SEEING LIGHTNING AND HEARING THUNDER. IF THIS TIME IS LESS THAN 30 SECONDS, LIGHTNING IS STILL A POTENTIAL DANGER. AFTER HEARING THE LAST RUMBLE OF THUNDER, WAIT 30 MINUTES BEFORE LEAVING SHELTER. HALF OF ALL LIGHTNING DEATHS OCCUR AFTER THE STORM PASSES. IN EACH CASE, SEEK SAFETY INSIDE A SUBSTANTIAL BUILDING. IF A SUBSTANTIAL BUILDING IS NOT AVAILABLE, TAKE SHELTER IN A HARD-TOPPED METAL VEHICLE.

NUMBER FOUR, IF YOU ARE CAUGHT OUTSIDE IN A THUNDERSTORM AND CANNOT FIND SHELTER, YOU SHOULD TRY TO MINIMIZE YOUR RISK OF BEING STRUCK BY LIGHTNING. IN THESE INSTANCES YOU SHOULD AVOID ALL TALL OBJECTS SUCH AS TALL TREES AND POLES, AND AVOID THINGS THAT CONDUCT ELECTRICITY SUCH AS METAL BLEACHERS OR WIRE FENCES. ASSUME THE LIGHTNING SAFETY POSITION. SQUAT LOW TO THE GROUND ON THE BALLS OF YOUR FEET, PLACE YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR EARS AND PUT YOUR HEAD BETWEEN YOUR KNEES. MAKE YOURSELF THE SMALLEST TARGET POSSIBLE AND MINIMIZE YOUR CONTACT WITH THE GROUND. DO NOT LIE FLAT ON THE GROUND!

...LIGHTNING SAFETY INDOORS...

ANY SUBSTANTIAL BUILDING OFFERS THE BEST PROTECTION FROM LIGHTNING. BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER WHAT HAPPENS IF THE STRUCTURE GETS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING. FOR A SHELTER TO PROVIDE PROTECTION FROM LIGHTNING, IT MUST CONTAIN A MECHANISM FOR CONDUCTING THE ELECTRICAL CURRENT FROM THE POINT OF CONTACT TO THE GROUND. THESE MECHANISMS MAY BE ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE STRUCTURE OR WITHIN ITS WALLS. LIGHTNING CAN TRAVEL ALONG THE OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING OR MAY FOLLOW METAL CONTACTS TO THE GROUND.

SMALL STRUCTURES SUCH AS THOSE FOUND ON ATHLETIC FIELDS, PARKS, GOLF COURSES, PICNIC AREAS, AND SCHOOL YARDS ARE NOT DESIGNED TO PROTECT PEOPLE FROM LIGHTNING. ALSO, VINYL OR METAL SHEDS SHOULD BE AVOIDED DURING THUNDERSTORMS.

THE THREE MAIN WAYS LIGHTNING ENTERS BUILDINGS ARE:

- FROM A DIRECT STRIKE
- THROUGH WIRES OR PIPES
- THROUGH THE GROUND.

LIGHTNING CAN ALSO TRAVEL THROUGH THE ELECTRICAL, PHONE, PLUMBING AND RADIO OR TELEVISION SYSTEMS, .AND THROUGH ANY METAL WIRES OR BARS IN CONCRETE WALLS OR FLOORING.

IF LIGHTNING IS NEARBY, REFRAIN FROM USING THE TELEPHONE, UNLESS IN AN ABSOLUTE EMERGENCY. STAY AWAY FROM WINDOWS AND DOORS, AND AVOID CONTACT WITH CONCRETE WALLS OR CARPORTS WHICH CONTAIN METAL REINFORCING BARS. AVOID USING WASHERS AND DRYERS. DO NOT WASH YOUR HANDS OR TAKE A SHOWER.

LIGHTNING ALSO GENERATES ELECTRICAL SURGES THAT CAN DAMAGE ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT. IF POSSIBLE, UNPLUG ANY APPLIANCES AND ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT WELL BEFORE A THUNDERSTORM THREATENS.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT LIGHTNING OR LIGHTNING SAFETY, PLEASE VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

[HTTP://WWW.LIGHTNINGSAFETY.NOAA.GOV](http://WWW.LIGHTNINGSAFETY.NOAA.GOV)

[HTTP://WWW.FLORIDADISASTER.ORG/KIDS/INDEX2.HTM](http://WWW.FLORIDADISASTER.ORG/KIDS/INDEX2.HTM)